

I-81

UPDATE

Virginia Department of Transportation

February 2004

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *I-81 Update*, a newsletter published periodically by the Virginia Department of Transportation on issues associated with Interstate 81 in Virginia. This edition introduces you to the new I-81 Corridor Improvement Study.

Completed more than 30 years ago, I-81 currently carries more and heavier vehicles than it was originally designed to handle.

The Corridor Improvement Study will consider future improvements to I-81 from the Virginia/West Virginia state line to the Virginia/Tennessee state line – a distance of 325 miles. The Corridor Improvement Study is just beginning and is currently in the phase called *Scoping*. The I-81 Corridor Improvement Study will lead to the completion of a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). FHWA and VDOT have agreed to comply with NEPA by conducting the study in a two-part, or tiered, process.

When the Tier 1 study is completed, these decisions will be made:

- Improvement concepts for highway and rail facilities, such as the number of additional highway lanes that may be needed; partial or complete separation of trucks and passenger vehicles; and additional rail capacity
- Approval to advance I-81 as a toll pilot project under current federal law
- Roadway and rail components to be studied in Tier 2

Your input during the study process is important as we identify transportation needs, begin developing a broad range of solutions to meet those needs, and evaluate the impacts of the potential solutions.

PUBLIC MEETINGS SET FOR I-81 CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT STUDY

Seven public information meetings are scheduled along the 325-mile Interstate 81 corridor in February 2004, and interested citizens are encouraged to attend to learn about the new I-81 Corridor Improvement Study and to provide their ideas about how the I-81 corridor could function in the future.



The meetings, called Public Scoping Meetings, are a part of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Study sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). The study will identify deficiencies along the interstate as well as opportunities for improvements throughout the corridor in Virginia.

The meetings are part of the public involvement component of the corridor improvement study, which is being conducted under the auspices of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Other meetings and opportunities for feedback will be offered to citizens throughout the study.

During the scoping meetings, citizens can view displays and maps pertaining to the corridor. The purpose of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Study, as well

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Public Scoping Meetings are scheduled from 4–8 p.m. at the locations shown below:

February 10		February 12	
Abingdon	Wytheville	Lexington	Harrisonburg
Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center Grand Hall One Partnership Circle Abingdon, VA 24212	Ramada Inn of Wytheville 955 Pepper's Ferry Road Wytheville, VA 24382	Hampton Inn 401 E. Nelson Street Lexington, VA 24450	Four Points by Sheraton 1400 E. Market Street Harrisonburg, VA 22801
February 11		February 17	
Christiansburg	Salem	Winchester	
Montgomery County Government Center 1st Floor Multipurpose Room 755 Roanoke Street Christiansburg, VA 24073	Salem Civic Center Community Room 1001 Boulevard Salem, VA 24153	Travelodge of Winchester 160 Front Royal Pike Winchester, VA 22602	

Additional information on upcoming public meetings, public hearings and workshops will be posted regularly at: www.VirginiaDOT.org

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as the study's schedule, will be displayed. Citizens also can speak one-on-one with study team members to get information about the study. Meeting participants will have the opportunity to leave comments in written form, or speak with a court reporter, who will record their comments and suggestions.

Scoping meetings are important in fulfilling NEPA requirements because they provide citizens with an early opportunity to help identify the need for improvements within the corridor, as well as identify the issues to be included in the study's Environmental Impact Statement.

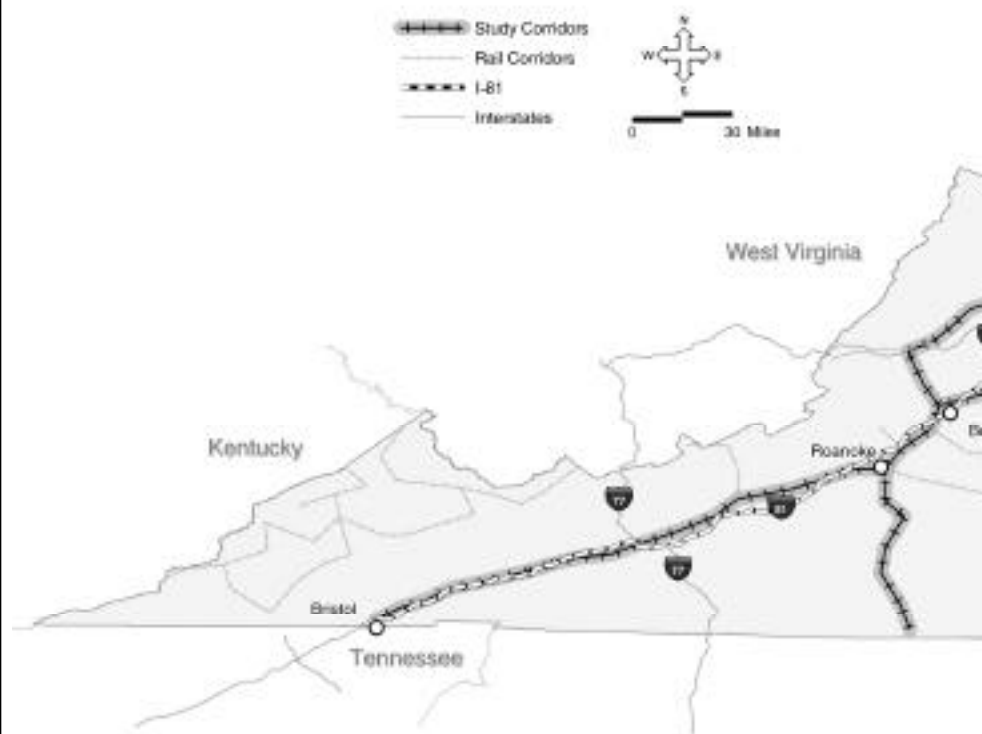
In addition to public meetings, a Web site is available that includes continuously monitored e-mail accounts at www.VirginiaDOT.org.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The I-81 Corridor Improvement Study will identify deficiencies throughout the corridor, develop a range of potential solutions, and evaluate those solutions. Broad issues – not site-specific situations – will be addressed in this study. A Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement will be produced, which will identify areas for further study in subsequent Tier 2 study and documentation.



STUDY MAP



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I-81 CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT STUDY Q & A

Will the Study Consider the Options for Improving I-81 Proposed by Two Companies through the PPTA?

VDOT and FHWA will rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives. We anticipate that the improvement concepts evaluated could include, among others, the options proposed through Virginia's PPTA process.

How will Rail Options be Considered in the Study?

Detailed traffic and transportation studies will be conducted to identify transportation deficiencies associated with the I-81 corridor. Potential solutions that address these deficiencies, including rail and a combination of rail and highway, will be evaluated to determine their ability to address those deficiencies.

What is Tiering?

The tiering or phasing of Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) allows broad discretion on issues to be addressed in first and second tier environmental documents. This flexible approach was agreed to by the Federal Highway Administration and the Virginia Department of Transportation for the I-81 Corridor Improvement Study. This study will consist of a Tier 1 EIS, a Record of Decision (ROD) from FHWA to conclude Tier 1, and the defining of issues to be addressed in further Tier 2 environmental study.

When Will the Public Have an Opportunity to Participate in the Study?

There will be numerous opportunities for public participation in the study, including public meetings, a Web site, www.VirginiaDOT.org, and a continuously monitored e-mail account through which anyone can provide comments.



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Inside

- 2004 Public Meeting
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STUDY SCHEDULE

This portion of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Study is scheduled to conclude in about 18 months. Here is a list of scheduled study tasks and completion times:

Scoping

Spring 2004

Determines the scope of issues to be addressed and identifies the significant issues related to the I-81 corridor.

Traffic and Transportation Analysis

Summer 2004

The year 2035 traffic conditions will be projected and analyzed in order to identify corridor deficiencies and operating characteristics of concepts.

Concept Development/Refinement

Fall 2004

Develops the options to address corridor deficiencies.

Environmental Impact Analysis

Winter 2004/2005

Evaluates the impacts of transportation improvement concepts at a general level. Site specific analyses will occur in Tier 2.

Tier 1 Draft EIS

Winter 2005

Documents the traffic, engineering and environmental information.

Public Hearings

Spring 2005

Provides opportunity for the public to comment on the Tier 1 Draft EIS.

Tier 1 Final EIS

Summer 2005

Documents Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) action and addresses the comments on the Tier 1 Draft EIS and from the Public Hearing.

Following completion of the Tier 1 EIS, a Record of Decision (ROD) will be issued by the Federal Highway Administration. Detailed Tier 2 studies are expected to advance in phases.



For additional information regarding the study, please contact:

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